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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2870
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2735
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3364
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3495
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000518

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP, ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: A/S BOUCHER VISIT DRAWS SIGNIFICANT MEDIA
COVERAGE

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher visited Turkmenistan April 14-17, holding a meeting with President Berdimuhamedov, and meetings with other high-ranking government officials. The visit received generally accurate and wide media coverage with little anti-American spin. One exception was Iranian radio's Turkmen language service. Boucher's April 16 press conference with foreign media stringers and one state TV crew received accurate and positive coverage. Most media focused on remarks regarding energy diversification and Afghanistan-related issues. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Turkmen language service carried an accurate, exclusive interview story with Boucher. Some media accurately carried Post's press release on the visit. END SUMMARY.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT BOUCHER'S MEETING WITH TURKMEN LEADER AND OTHER MEETINGS IN TURKMENISTAN

13. (U) On April 15, the "Watan" evening TV news program (Turkmen) highlighted Boucher's meeting with Turkmen leader as the first story of the newscast. The story praised the new U.S. administration's warm greetings and readiness to assist Turkmenistan's development in a wide-range of areas. It noted that both sides expressed readiness to deepen U.S.-Turkmenistan relations and partnership, with emphasis on regional cooperation, development of the energy sector, and security. Boucher's remarks were accurately translated into Turkmen. The following day, state-run dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) carried articles similar to the "Watan" broadcast on their front pages. The state website "Turkmenistan Golden Age" (Turkmen, Russian and English) also posted similar articles on the meeting. The same day, Boucher's meeting with the President the lead story on "Turkmenistan" TV Channel's (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) hourly news program. On subsequent days, most of state weeklies reprinted the daily newspapers' articles on the visit.

14. (U) The April 16 edition of the "Watan" program accurately reported on Boucher's other official meetings and a session with students of Turkmenistan's Institute for International Relations.
(NOTE: The Watan TV news program re-broadcasts its content several

times the day after the original broadcast. END NOTE.)

¶15. (U) An April 16 broadcast of Iranian radio "Gorgan Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran" (Turkmen) gave a negative report on Boucher's visit. While noting the U.S. support for diversifying Turkmenistan's energy routes, the broadcast reported the visit as a U.S. attempt to gain political ground for accessing Central Asia's energy resources. The broadcast also claimed the United States is looking for military partnership with countries of the region and is trying to marginalize Russia's role in energy exports from the region.

¶16. (U) On April 15-16, opposition websites "Chronicles of Turkmenistan" (Russian) and "Gundogar" (Russian), as well as Azeri News Agency "Trend" (Russian, English), "Ferghana.ru" (Russian), "ITAR-TASS" (English, Russian), "Platts Commodity News" (English), "RIA Orienda" (English), "CA-NEWS" (Russian), "TURKMENinform" (Russian) and "turkmenistan.ru" (Russian) accurately covered Boucher's meeting with the President. (NOTE: All stories drew heavily from state media reporting. END NOTE.)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT BOUCHER'S DISCUSSION OF COOPERATION ON AFGHANISTAN

¶17. (U) April 16 stories from the "Associated Press" (English), "Agence France Presse" (English), Russian "ITAR-TASS" (Russian) and Ukrainian "RBC-Ukraine" (Russian) accurately quoted and covered positively Boucher's remarks from the press conference regarding U.S. regional cooperation and efforts in Afghanistan. The AP story was picked up in several American and International papers. The "Daily Times" also carried the AFP story. (English) "EurasiaNet" (English) on April 17 carried a story, which accurately covered

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Boucher's discussion of policy with Afghanistan, but noted that he did not propose any new arrangements during the visit.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT BOUCHER'S REMARKS ON ENERGY EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION

¶18. (U) On April 16, Russian news agencies "RIA Novosti" (Russian) accurately carried Boucher's press conference remarks on the need for energy diversification for countries of the region. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Turkmen language service (Turkmen) April 17 broadcast accurately reported an exclusive interview with Boucher, addressing many of the same topics

¶19. (U) On April 18, Azeri news sources "Trend" (Russian, English) and "Day.Az" (Russian), including Russian "CA-NEWS" (Russian), accurately and in full reprinted the Embassy press release on the visit. The same day, an RFE/RL article web article (English) highlighted Boucher's remarks on energy security and diversification. Turkish "Journal of Turkish Weekly" reprinted the RFE/RL article.

¶110. (U) "Turkmenistan" TV Channel also attended the press conference. And after some encouragement, the lead journalist asked a question, still a rarity at post-organized press events. The channel is planning a lengthier feature piece on Boucher's which may air on or about April 23.

¶111. (U) COMMENT: Turkmenistan State media gave extensive and accurate coverage to the visit, following the norm for most recent high-level USG visits. Russian media outlets also had generally accurate coverage and did not make an effort to paint the visit in an anti-American or "Great Game" context. Western media outlets also avoided the "Great Game" comparisons and had generally accurate coverage. Overall, the areas of U.S. support for Turkmenistan's pipeline diversification and Turkmen support for stabilizing Afghanistan were the most widely highlighted. The one particularly negative news story came from an Iranian radio broadcast in Turkmen language which is not believed to have wide listenership and is only available in areas close to the Iranian border. Post's use of press releases and press conferences continues to prove useful in Turkmenistan's media environment.

MILES